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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, AND INR/AA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: U.S.-UK PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT IN ANAMBRA

REF: A. ABUJA 2030

[1](#)B. ABUJA 2001

[1](#)C. LAGOS 449

Classified By: CG Donna M. Blair; Reasons Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The electoral campaign is on in earnest in Anambra State in advance of the key February 6, 2010, gubernatorial election. Serious structural and electoral process problems exist in Anambra, notably the ability (or inability) of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct a free, fair, transparent vote and tabulation count. Voter registration and security concerns remain paramount too, as voiced by Anambra residents to ConGen Lagos reps and the UK Deputy High Commissioner during their November 12-14 assessment tour of Anambra State. Anambrans sense the February 2010 vote is vital to the future of sound electoral processes and democracy in Nigeria, and for the development and stability of their industrious state. Most view this vote too as a litmus test for, or harbinger of, the national 2011 elections. Many are appealing for the United States, the UK, and others to watch closely and speak out on the Anambra elections, as quite a few fear that "the rigging has already started." Also in a recent foreign policy speech the Ambassador highlighted that the international community will be watching the Anambra elections to see if Nigeria is capable of holding credible elections. END SUMMARY.

JOY OVER UBA RULING; LET THE GAMES AND CAMPAIGN BEGIN

[1](#)2. (C) The road to the February 6, 2010, gubernatorial election in Anambra State would and should seem clearer now, with "governor-in-waiting" Andy Uba's exhaustive legal challenges (Refs A and B) dismissed and consigned to history (Ref C). At least that is some of the sentiment the U.S. Mission's pre-election team heard on the street in Anambra's capital Awka and commercial hub Onitsha. ConGen Lagos Pol/Econ Chief, FSN Pol Specialist, and the Lagos-based British Deputy High Commissioner traveled to Anambra State November 12-14 and met with the INEC, party officials and candidates, journalists and other civil society reps, the police, and business leaders to gauge their sense of pre-election politics there. The team spoke with these individuals on the eve of and after the court ruling (Ref C). They seemed to be holding a collective breath for "the right outcome" in Enugu (COMMENT: The one that occurred, as it turned out. END COMMENT.), so that all could get on with the

state gubernatorial electoral campaign in earnest, officially launched on November 8.

13. (C) Initial meetings on November 12 were held in Awka with Chief Rowland Uwa, Anambra State's INEC Commissioner, who had also invited his senior staff to attend. Uwa asserted that "nothing went wrong" in Anambra's 2007 election, even though 100-plus legal challenges emerged afterwards. He did acknowledge, however, that "there may be problems" with the state's electronic voting system, but he still expects the elections on February 6 to go off "smoothly and peacefully." (COMMENT: The team found this hour-long session underwhelming and quite predictable, more a recitation of INEC's Soviet-style org chart and plethora of commissioners and hangers-on than a clear vision for running elections better here. Local INEC officials in Anambra do not appear well-prepared for the February 6 vote, and are frankly oblivious to many of the structural flaws like those associated with the electoral roll and need for a smooth, transparent registration process. The advance work needed to conduct a credible, smooth gubernatorial election in Anambra seems sadly lacking too, although Uwa expressed pride over voter awareness and education campaigns that INEC staff have conducted around the state. END COMMENT.)

14. (C) Dr. Chris Ngige, again a leading candidate but now with the Action Congress (AC), vice PDP, told us "he did not expect (Uba's chicanery) would destroy the electoral system." He added that "the only way for Andy to play now is to run as a candidate" with one of the 27 political parties that have applied with INEC to stand in the February 6, 2010,

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vote. Ngige's slick campaign literature and prominent posters portray him as a "martyr" by his past "suffering," as a 2003 election-related suit forced Ngige from the governorship in 2006. Ngige received the U.S.-UK team outside of Awka at his massive country villa, with much security present and his cabinet-in-waiting also assembled. A medical doctor by profession, Ngige does not want for prescriptions and his populist campaign reminds voters he delivered on jobs, roads, and a low crime rate during his "clean, productive three-year tenure." He claims a large flock in both Anambra and the United States, giving us his vision via a brochure from the Anambra State Association (ASA-USA) 2009 National Convention in Washington, D.C.

15. (C) Senator Uche Ekwunife, the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) hopeful suggested the pall of Uba's test case had suppressed active campaigning. The pace should pick up, with this legal impediment now gone. The highly-confident and flamboyantly God-fearing Senator Ekwunife described herself to us as a "rich, comfortable woman," as she had a private sector career as a UBA banker before politics. She said she has her "own source of funds," but is also actively pursuing fundraising and has even received several vehicles from dedicated supporters. She most fears a smear campaign against her as a woman, blackmail, and "godfatherism." Ekwunife once belonged to the PDP but became "disenchanted" and split from the party to form her own movement, which she believes is gaining momentum. Ekwunife is going for the grass roots, especially appealing to hard-working women as she seeks to become Nigeria's first female governor. Her campaign posters and billboards are all over Awka and Onitsha like wallpaper, especially outside her prominent roadside Awka headquarters with its massive fleet of minibuses adorned with her smiling face, golden head-wrap, and bejeweled cross necklace. "Uche," as she is called locally, predicted that, if the election were held today, she would win, and by February she will "floor the men."

16. (C) Activist Emeka Umueagbalasi also commended the Appeals Court's rejection of Uba's bid, noting that his coalition of civil society organizations will closely observe and monitor political events in Anambra state in the run-up and aftermath of the February 6 elections. He voiced concern over the role

of the INEC and the police during this entire process. The U.S.-UK team also met with three journalists from "Punch," the "Guardian," and the News Agency of Nigeria off-the-record, who offered useful themes for us to consider when watching Anambra. They believed the February 6 vote will be a "test case" for multiparty democracy in Nigeria. How the INEC conducts the mechanics will be a useful lens for Nigeria nationwide in 2011, although these newsmen were not sanguine about a proper process. An evolution is on in Nigeria, per our sources, from the "traditional big man and pol," dispenser of patronage, to a more qualified technocratic and emerging leadership class, like we have already seen with the governors of Lagos and Edo states. They suggested "the politics of personality" will still feature in February 2006 in Anambra, but this "struggle for the soul" of the voter in the name of good, post-electoral governance is clearly underway. Religion will also be a powerful undertone, particularly Catholic-Anglican-Evangelical parrying, per these scribes.

17. (C) Security and electoral process integrity were key elements of our November 13 talks with senior Nigeria Police Force (NPF) management at State Headquarters, Awka. We discussed the ubiquitous police checkpoints, with 3-4 AK-47 toting cops (and some army) every couple of miles along the potholed "freeway" that snakes through the state. (Note: This presence is not linked to the elections. The road has had that kind of police coverage for the last 12 months because of its closeness to the Niger Delta. End Note.) The gregarious Public Relations Officer (PRO) said the NPF is "a service-oriented organization that wants to leave smiles on the faces of the people it deals with," adding that security statewide has stepped up to address armed robberies and kidnappings. The NPF promised it is gearing up for February to protect the entire electoral process and personnel, as well as the voters. He also noted that the police, so as "not to be caught unawares," were on stand-by alert for any trouble later that day (and night) following the Uba verdict. None appeared to have occurred, and outwardly to us the Saturday scene in both Awka and Onitsha stayed calm, albeit frenetic in the big market town on the Niger River, hard by

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the rickety bridge to Delta State.

PDP-INEC CORE PROBABLY ROTTEN, WHILE COMMERCE BUSTLES

18. (C) Over tea and coffee, the team asked businessmen at the Kates Associated Industry (KAI) in Onitsha, home to one of Africa's most sprawling markets, how they viewed state politics and the nascent electoral campaign. If anything, the tiny but densely-populated (5 million), predominantly Ibo and Catholic Anambra State cares more about commerce than politics. An intense entrepreneurial energy and a pro-business/new building buzz remain ever-present. These respectable, humble, and serious private-sector people care more about a sound enabling environment and platform for trade and investment, and clamor for better infrastructure (roads, power, telecom) as well as good education for human resources. Outside their factory gate, legions of petty traders hustled to make a naira/buck, amidst teeming chaos, environmental degradation and decrepit public works, as well as widespread squalor, stench, and rot. But they do it with stoic style, class, and flair, as we witnessed while wending our way through the living labyrinth that is Onitsha market on a sweaty Saturday morning.

19. (C) Meanwhile, the KAI men echoed concerns we heard elsewhere about "INEC's ineptitude, a flawed registration process, and rigging already underway." Our hosts were looking for someone who could generate jobs and development in Anambra, and they said that Ngige had done this well during his abbreviated stint as governor. They commended our trek to their plant, and lamented they have never seen/did

not know their Assembly legislators from Abuja. As a Nigerian manufacturer, KAI was not even aware of the pending Local Content bill; we told them about it. The businessmen wondered where does INEC end, and the PDP begin (and vice versa), and were not optimistic for a clean vote in February, although they did have a more positive outlook for the future. They expected that the PDP would ultimately get its act together and field a competitive candidate for Anambra's governorship. The PDP may still win, even with its early family feud. If the PDP picks former Central Bank Governor Charles Soludo, many interlocutors feel his candidacy will be formidable.

¶10. (C) Ngige's AC party officials also warned of INEC (and, by extension, PDP) trickery in the flawed registration drive with time running out, the questionable transport or "translocation" of ballot and recording materials as February 6 draws nearer, and unsecure shuffling of ballots that should be accountable to set serial numbers. The AC crowd appealed to the UK and the United States (and others outside Nigeria) "to send scores of monitors, observers, watchers to Anambra in February." They also asked international partners "to speak out on how important the 2010 Anambra vote is for Nigeria's electoral credibility and future, a year out from national elections." (COMMENT: These AC reps spoke about the electoral irregularities, apparent or imagined, with great knowledge and passion. As most had been PDP apparatchiks in 2007 or before, we suspect that they knew (or wrote) the playbook, with the INEC. END COMMENT.)

NOBODY HOME AT AGPA, AND PDP (FOR NOW)

¶11. (C) Interestingly, the U.S.-UK assessment team tried on several occasions to meet with representatives of incumbent Governor Peter Obi's APGA. We arrived as far as campaign headquarters November 13, which was somewhat dusty and scruffy with piles of bland leaflets to deliver, presumably by the many motorcycles idle in the outside compound. A low-level APGA functionary begged off, saying that his principal had been called away for an urgent meeting. (COMMENT: We do understand that many meetings with a focus on the Anambra elections featured in Enugu and Abuja while we were in Awka, thus diverting APGA officials available for our calls. Moreover, given the disarray within the PDP, the apparent national-state schism, and the lack of a candidate, we thought it prudent not to inject our presence in Anambra into this intra-party rumble, but will follow up with the PDP at a later date once its Anambra slate is set. END COMMENT.)

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COMMENT

¶12. (C) As a result of our joint U.S.-UK assessment tour, our answer to the key question of "Will Anambra State's February 2010 gubernatorial election be clean and credible?" now remains "Not likely." Serious structural and electoral process problems persist in Anambra, notably the apparent inability of the INEC to prepare for a transparent voting process and proper tabulation of results. Meanwhile, the PDP appears bent on winning this election at all costs. The U.S. and UK officials heard often about real voter registration concerns and "a politicized INEC," while seeing firsthand the security challenges and a heightened police presence. Anambra's feel the February 2010 vote is vital to the future of sound electoral processes and democracy in Nigeria, and for the development and stability of their own industrious state. Yet quite a few told us that they fear that "the rigging has already started."

¶13. (C) Many are appealing to the United States, the UK, and others to monitor this contest closely and send observation

teams, and to speak out on the Anambra elections. Their sense is that it should matter to those who truly care about Nigeria, and not just the residents and voters of this small, southeastern Nigerian state of five million souls. Indeed, Anambra's February 2010 election is a microcosm of and harbinger for Nigeria 2011, and one that merits our close watching. The U.S. Mission to Nigeria will continue to collaborate closely with our UK counterparts, consult with appropriate GON authorities, and follow developments by deploying U.S. Mission personnel to cover this important vote.

BLAIR